



Session Update 2003



Representative
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Dear Neighbor:

This is (and continues to be) one of the most difficult budget years we've faced in a generation.

With Democrats holding a slim majority in the House and Republicans an even slimmer majority in the Senate, this was a difficult year to pass legislation, much less agree on a budget.

Our major accomplishment was the passing of a ten-year transportation plan. With significant money for I-5, I 405 and for transit, I think it's a very good package. We've waited far too long to make improvements to our transportation system.

As I write this, however, we still have to come up with a compromise on prescription drug reform and two important budgets – the operating budget and the capital, or construction, budget.

Feel free to contact me if you'd like an update on the budget situation, or if you would like additional information on any of the items mentioned in this newsletter.

As always, it is an extreme honor and pleasure to serve as your representative in Olympia.

Thank you.

Velma Veloria
Velma

Simple Majority

Even though 59.94 percent of the voters supported the Renton school measure back in February it was not enough. Highline received almost as much support – 59.02 percent – but that too wasn't enough.

As you know, school levies take a super majority – 60 percent – to pass. This requirement has led to the failure of several school measures across the state, even if they've received up to 59% of the vote.

Just a handful of votes stand between after school activities, books, computers in the classrooms, critical building maintenance and other critical supplies for our kids.

In March, the state House of Representatives passed legislation, HJR 4204, that would have allowed voters to decide whether school measures should pass with a simple or super majority. Simple majorities – 50 percent plus one – are enough to build stadiums, jails and win a race for political office. Why shouldn't it be enough to do right by our kids?

Unfortunately, the legislation stalled in the Senate. We will continue our work on this next year. That's a promise.



Prescription Drug Reform

Getting the right drugs to the right person at the right time — at a reasonable cost. We've been trying to do this for the past several years. We're probably closer this year than we've ever been before.

Democrats, Republicans and the Governor all agree that the cost of prescription drugs are too high and that something has to be done to make them more affordable — without sacrificing quality of care.

By the time you read this we will already have started our "special session." I sincerely hope we will be able to find a solution that both Democrats and Republicans can agree to.

Our Prescription Drug Plan:

- Adopts a preferred drug list based on the best medical evidence available.
- Allows for bulk buying, letting the state get volume discounts. And everyone who wants to can join in on the savings.
- Allows physicians to prescribe the drug they believe is best for their patients by writing "dispense as written."
- Educates consumers and providers about the list, how it was developed, and how it works.



Clean and Sober Housing

Special housing arrangements – Clean and Sober Housing – are critical for people who are trying to clean up their lives through treatment programs, etc. It also helps get recovering addicts off the street.

Although there are a variety of laws regulating housing in this state, the Resident Landlord-Tenant Act (RLTA) governs apartment houses. Until now, Clean and Sober Housing was not specifically mentioned in that law making it difficult for landlords to evict tenants who relapse and start using again. This bill creates a new category for "drug and alcohol free" housing and establishes a process for letting tenants meet with staff and come up with a new treatment plan. I was proud to sponsor the House version of this bill, HB 1472.

I also sponsored legislation to allow mobile homes to meet state and local fire/safety regulations, HB 1786. Both of these bills were sent to the Governor.



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Transportation

One of the greatest accomplishments this session was passing a comprehensive, bipartisan transportation plan. This plan emphasizes the right priorities: safety, preservation, and tackling the traffic gridlock that is hurting our economy, harming our environment, and damaging our quality of life.

The ten-year transportation funding plan approved by the legislature includes several hundred million dollars for projects in the 11th legislative district, including \$132 million in funding for the Alaskan Way Viaduct, more than \$200 million in improvements to I-5 (including \$55 million for HOV lanes from Tukwila to Pierce County) and \$140 million for I-405.

An additional \$600 million will be spent on public transportation state-wide — vanpools, park and ride lots, and paratransit.

We want to start projects we can finish and finish projects that we've already started, maximizing taxpayer dollars. This is a momentous accomplishment for the state of Washington and I am proud that we were able to come together and develop a comprehensive plan for the state.

Operating Budget

Negotiations continue over how to solve the \$2.7 billion hole in the state's operating budget. I am still fighting to retain adequate funding for education, health care for kids, and adult dental, vision and hearing. We are also working on including money for our state's Home Health Care Workers.

Some programs of specific interest to the 11th district include legal services for the poor (Civil Indigent Legal Services), senior services in King County (CASA), programs that help minority and women's businesses (OMWBE), and programs that make money for our state — funding for the Film and Video Office and the Washington Manufacturing Service.

Capital Budget

Several projects were funded in the Capital Budget. *(Final negotiations continue, but these items will most likely be included in the final plan.)*

They include:

Housing Trust Fund (\$80 million) – Provide thousands of housing units, mostly for seniors and the disabled.

Showalter Playground in Tukwila (\$100,000) – Purchase new lights for the ball field.

Grandmother's Hill (\$300,000) – Preserve 10 acres on a site sacred to some Native Americans

Museum of Flight (\$350,000) – Improve access and updates for the museum's archives and collections.

Wing Luke Asian Museum (\$1,500,000) – Purchase a new museum facility.

Filipino Community Center (\$200,000) – Build a new Filipino Community Center.

Duwamish Tribal Center (\$350,000) – Construct a multi-use heritage facility in the form of a longhouse.

Georgetown Community Council (\$50,000) – Relocate the Hat n' Boots to Oxbow Park.

Budgets:

The state manages three separate and distinct budgets. The Capital Budget (which funds school construction, parks and housing), the Operating Budget (facing a \$2.7 billion deficit), and the Transportation Budget (mainly funded by the gas tax).



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Economic Development in WA State

As Chair of Trade and Economic Development Committee, my goal is to continue to find innovative ways to provide economic vitality for everyone in this state. This means providing access to workforce training and higher education programs for those who want it, building infrastructure for business (including roads, water and sewer lines) and ensuring ready access to capital for small businesses.

HB 1061 (Apprenticeship Pathways)

We made it easier for workers to go back to community and technical colleges in order to get associate degrees. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges will look at current rules regarding instruction, course grading and tuition waivers with an eye toward reducing barriers for apprentices seeking to earn associate degrees.

HJM 4011 (State Investment Board)

We want to give small businesses in the state every opportunity to succeed. As any small business owner will tell you, access to investment capital is a critical factor to the success of any enterprise. Currently, only 3.3 percent of the State Investment Board's funds are invested in local companies. Just days after the House passed a resolution urging the board to invest more of its funds in Washington state companies, they voted on a policy to do just that.

HB 1032 (CERB)

As far as creating or starting a business is concerned, sewer lines, water lines, roads, etc. are often the critical factor for deciding where businesses choose to locate or expand. Since 1982, the Community Economic Revitalization Board has awarded \$88 million for projects across the state and has generated \$1.5 billion in private investments and kept the state from losing 19,000 private-sector jobs in 35 counties. We passed legislation creating a permanent funding source for this critical economic development tool — one of the few options we have to convince businesses to either locate or expand here in Washington.

HB 1059 (Joint Committee on Trade Policy)

Keeping Washington competitive in the global economy will require educating our legislators, employers and employees about the impact of international trade agreements on the local economy. Establishing this committee will give us the opportunity to monitor and comment on international trade agreements as they affect Washington state — making us the first state in the nation to have such a committee.

HB 1973 (Promoting Tourism)

Nature-based tourism already supports 21,000 jobs in this state. By promoting such tourism we have the potential to create even more jobs in some of our most depressed areas. We need to spread the word about Washington's diverse climate and the possibilities to observe a wide variety of animals and plants. We have the potential to attract both domestic and international visitors.

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